



**44th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA)
Regional Conference
Trinidad and Tobago**

‘Globalisation and Nationalism: Quo Vadis? (Where are we going?) Impacts on Commonwealth Parliaments’

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Opening Remarks

**Mr Akbar Khan
Secretary-General
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**

- ***Her Excellency Madam President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;***
- ***Hon Prime Minister, Dr Keith Christopher Towley MP;***
- ***Hon President of the Senate, Hon Christine Kangaloo;***
- ***Hon Speaker of the House, Brigid Annisette-George;***
- ***Hon Leader of the Opposition;***
- ***Hon Delegates of the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region Conference;***
- ***Honourable Ministers;***
- ***Right Honourable and Honourable Members;***
- ***Members of the Diplomatic Corps;***

- ***Madam Clerk Mrs Jacqui Miguel-Sampson;***
- ***Secretaries of the Delegations;***
- ***Regional Representatives: The First Peoples;***
- ***Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;***
- ***Friends***

It is a great honour to join you to make some Opening Remarks on the theme of the 44th Annual Regional Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, namely, *Globalisation and Nationalism: Quo Vadis? Impacts on Commonwealth Parliaments'*

I would like to specifically thank the Presiding Officers, along with your colleagues, for all your hard work in making this Conference possible.

Having left Guyana several decades ago as a young boy for the United Kingdom, opportunities to return to the Caribbean always warm my heart. You have given us a truly Caribbean heartfelt welcome to Trinidad and Tobago.

Honourable Members,

This theme of this year's regional conference touches upon some of the biggest challenges that Parliaments as representative institutions face in the modern Commonwealth and beyond.

Globalisation and Nationalism in my humble view are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is an inherent link between them, demonstrating the increasing global interconnectedness of the world.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalism played a central role in shaping the world, from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, to the emergence of independent nations, the two world wars and the rise of the world's superpowers.

In our own Commonwealth, it was our forefather's strong sense of nationalism that served as the catalyst for self-determination and independence.

Throughout history nationalism can be found almost everywhere, taking its form in politicians, national leaders, propaganda and mass media.

Today we are again witnessing the pervasive forces of nationalism, perhaps the most prevalent now globally than at any point in the post-war period.

It is important to underscore that scholars often make a distinction between the two types of nationalism; *ethnic* and *civic* nationalism.

Civic nationalism is said to be inclusive and emphasises the legal political community and as such can be a great unifier and contributes positively to effective development and state building.

In contrast, ethnic nationalism is said to be 'exclusive', focusing strongly on cultural matters and is often used by politicians to promote national unity and patriotism. A much uglier face of nationalism today, however, is when ethnic 'nationalism' is fused with 'populism' to fuel a politics of resentment and nostalgia, and a reassertion of dominance over ethnic, racial and cultural minorities. It should be recalled that these very aspects of nationalism contributed to the two major world wars.

So, what is really going on? In essence, discontent appears to be revolving around several deep-rooted societal shifts:

- First, there are high levels of political **distrust**, which are being fuelled by the populist leaders who present themselves and their supporters as victims pitted against a group of 'elites of a political system' that has become less representative of key groups.

There is sense that too much individual sovereignty has been taken away by an overweening government of 'elites', who have arranged the rules for their own benefit resulting in crony capitalism for the well-placed elites';

the imposition of more regulation on citizen's have left them feeling a loss of control over their personal choices which have increasingly been taken away, together with opportunities so that life for ordinary people is no longer a fair game.

- Second, many citizens have strong and entrenched fears about the perceived **destruction** of national cultures, ways of life and values, amid unprecedented waves of migration resulting in ethnic change. The fear of loss of national culture and identity is compounded by concerns over the lack of control at borders against undesirable immigrants and potential terrorists.
- Third, accompanying this distrust and fear are anxieties related to **deprivation** and loss of jobs and income, along with a strong sense that they and their ethnic and social group are being left behind relative to others in society;
- Fourth and finally, many political systems in the developed and developing world are having to grapple with a new era of **dealignment**, in which bonds between the voter and traditional parties are breaking down and hence the path for new political challengers is much more open.

When one looks at these trends there is nothing ephemeral about the rise of nationalism and the perceived impacts of globalisation.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the nationalism we are seeing today is expected not only to persist, but to also increase and intensify in response to and in opposition to forces of globalisation.

Thus, according to Anthony Giddens, a prominent British sociologist known for his holistic view of modern societies, *'the revival of local nationalisms, and an accentuating of local identities, are directly bound up with globalising influences, to which they stand in opposition.'*

Given this prediction as to where we are going – Quo Vadis? What are the impacts on Commonwealth Parliaments?

The impact and challenges facing Commonwealth Parliaments was succinctly put in another way by the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt who asked:

'How can nations reap the gains of global co-operation in trade, culture, education, human rights and environmental protection while respecting, rather than diluting or crushing the world's national and other parochial identities, each with their own traditions and oral order?

In what kind of world can globalists and nationalists live together in peace?

The most immediate impact on Commonwealth Parliaments from the tension between 'nationalism and globalisation' is the persistent feeding of citizen's political distrust in the institution of Parliament to their daily lives. This impact is not only corrosive to public trust in political institutions but also poses a significant threat to representative democracy.

It is therefore vital for Parliament as an institution and parliamentarians as elected representatives to sit up and consider how they are going to respond to the serious concerns posed by rising nationalism in opposition to globalisation.

In fashioning their response, Parliamentarians of all political stripes need to listen carefully and constructively to each other and to citizen's concerns and to take them into account in policy making.

Nations have deep roots based on pre-political, cultural and ethnic identities. In this way, nationalism is a cultural doctrine that seeks to preserve and promote identity, culture and the autonomy of a nation.

To put it bluntly, all humans need to have a sense of belonging and nationalism can provide that- we belong to a nation.

At the same time, national governments have a primary responsibility to secure peace, stability and prosperity for its citizens.

In this respect, globalisation has served not only as an economic phenomenon lifting millions out of poverty but has also created political, cultural and legal networks across the world empowering people to challenge autocratic leaders, and in so doing to advance the rule of law and democracy.

We know that economic freedom and rising incomes have helped to nurture a more educated and politically aware middle class which have created active centres of influence outside of government. People who are economically free are more likely to exercise their political and civil rights to hold governments to account.

In contrast, a government which is nationalistic, protectionist and isolationist is more able to seal its citizens off from the rest of the world, thereby depriving them of the resources and information to challenge its authority. History has taught us that when nationalism is left to rise without accountability or a counterforce, terrible things can happen.

Big-data connected devices and digital technology coupled with inclusive and effective Parliaments are all enablers of democracy.

In my humble view, globalisation and nationalism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is an inherent link between them, demonstrating the increasing global interconnectedness of the nation states.

Nationalism and globalisation are here to stay. Their co-existence is not a battle in which only one is destined to emerge as the winner and the other as a loser – rather it is a mutually beneficial coexistence of two natural and compatible tendencies.

The relationship between nationalism and globalisation is one which Commonwealth Parliaments and Parliamentarians can for example actively hold in balance for the benefit of the national interest by ensuring the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These goals, if realised, would contribute to building resilient, empowered, inclusive and sustainable societies for the benefit of national communities and the planet.

Focused as they are on 'leaving no one behind' at the national, sub-national and global levels, achievement of the SDGs agreed at the multilateral level is the perfect antidote to the nationalists who claim that globalisation has failed the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities.

In this context nationalism can support globalisation in so far as and as long as globalisation extends inclusive and sustainable development to all and does not fundamentally challenge the system of nation states.

On the other hand, globalisation has a potential of containing aggressive nationalism that thrives in isolation and insecurity and may also create incentives for the resolution and prevention of conflicts by offering the benefits of integration to various multilateral structures and the greater prospects for economic development and prosperity.

In conclusion, the challenge for all Parliaments is to manage these two types of natural tendencies in a way that best upholds prospects for peace, security and prosperity. Strong democratic institutions that are inclusive, accountable and transparent not only provide the best defence against challenges to representative democracy but are best placed to take advantage of the full benefits that are to be had from nationalism and globalisation.

In this context, I respectfully encourage Parliaments of this region to consider undertaking a CPA Benchmarks assessment and to adopt the CPA codes of conduct aimed at strengthening accountability, inclusion and effectiveness in accordance with Goal 16 of SDGs on inclusive, effective, accountable Parliaments.

The relationship between nationalism and globalisation is pragmatic and will remain so as long as the risks of globalisation do not outweigh its benefits to the security and viability of the nation state and national communities.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

You have an exciting agenda ahead of you in coming days touching on these hugely important issues. I wish you great success in your deliberations throughout this Conference.

In closing, I wish to thank all branches for their support to the CPA family and especially the time given by Regional Representatives to attend Executive Committee Meetings to strengthen our governance, which is critical to our credibility as a parliamentary organisation promoting good governance. It is important to model best practice before you have the right to tell others to do so.

I also wish to thank all branches and their members for the warm welcome I have received during my term as Secretary-General.

Thank you.

-ENDS-

Notes on which this speech was prepared:

- Commentary by Daniel Griswold -Globalisation, Human Rights and Democracy 2006
- Globalisation of Politics – Brookings Institute
- MrGlobalisation, Nationalism & Globalisation, 23 May 2009
- Open Edition Books – Globalisation and Nationalism – Natalie Sababadze
- The Guardian.com/Comment is free - Nov 2018
- Nations and Nationalism 2019, p58-81